



Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2008) and subsequent 2012 revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

Merrydays and Henley Montessori

Memorial Hall, Station Road, Henley in Arden, Warks B95 5JP

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 20 September 2012

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 23 November 2012

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: July 2009

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 9 years.

Description of the school

Merrydays and Henley Montessori is based in a community hall near the centre of a small rural town. The premises comprise one large room, three adjoining smaller rooms and a kitchen. There are cloakroom and toilet facilities within a lobby area, and an additional side entrance.

The outside area consists of a tarmacked strip alongside the smaller classrooms, and a larger area to the rear of the property containing a climbing frame on a woodchip surface, with some established plants and shrubs.

The school has 60 places for children between 2 and 11 years of age but there are no children over 9 years currently attending. There are 73 children on roll. The pre-school children attend a mixture of sessions, either mornings, afternoons or full days; school age children all attend full days. The school is open during term times from 09:15 until 15:15 and provides for children with special educational needs as well as for those for whom English is an additional language. Children who stay over bring their own packed lunches.

The school is managed by the owner who is present daily. There are twelve other staff members. Eight of the team hold Montessori qualifications and six are qualified teachers.



Summary and conclusion

The philosophy and educational principles of Merrydays and Henley Montessori mirror those of Maria Montessori. The reflective practice, led by the owner/manager, ensures that the setting is adapting and meeting the needs of the children on a daily basis. Following a recommendation made during the first re-accreditation visit, staff have introduced free flow access to the outdoor area during the whole of the morning session, which has greatly improved the setting's capacity to give children the opportunity for developing their decision-making and self-discipline. Adults work very well together as a single team and treat all children respectfully, consistently and as individuals. Independence is exhibited by all children from the youngest age. Staff are flexible in supporting the freedom of movement and choice that the children enjoy. Some opportunities for the nursery aged children to lead group activities would benefit those children who are confident in their independence.

Learning and development is well organized and is based securely in Montessori pedagogy. The orderly and spacious rooms are well planned and used effectively. The wide range of appealing resources is well cared for by both adults and children within the classrooms. Materials are accessible and clearly arranged in relation to areas of learning. Outside resources are good, easily accessible for the children and organized in such a way as to enable their cycles of activity to take place.

Record keeping is good and, in response to a recommendation made during the first re-accreditation visit, staff are making it a more useful tool for assessing progress, as all the records for each child are now combined into one document. Parental contribution to record keeping is also increasing. Parents are very satisfied with the provision their children receive.

Under the strong leadership of the manager, the excellent staff team combines to create an effective Montessori setting. Through both a commitment to good practice, and a strong willingness to reflect on their own work, they demonstrate a clear capacity for continued development.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, and this merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:

- To continue the improvements to the combined record of learning that is compiled for each child, and to developing the progress tracking system.
- To encourage primary-age children to record their activities.

Philosophy:

The manager is fully committed to following Montessori principles within the setting, and this approach is shared by all staff.

Children benefit from being given the freedom to choose where to work on activities and for how long. These freedoms are coupled with clear boundaries, and a beautifully cared for and prepared environment. Children are active and engaged, and are shown deep respect from all the adults who work with them. The children lead the learning whilst the adults facilitate and support each individual. Good quality conversation and discussions are emphasized strongly,



and the school participates in Warwickshire's 'Time to Talk' language enhancement program.

Trust is evident across the school. The layout facilitates good freedom of movement between the rooms, and access to the outdoor areas is for the majority of the day, for all children in the school. Establishing free flow between indoors and outdoors has enriched the Montessori ethos and provision of Merrydays. Children's cycles of activity are well established and the attention given by the adults to settling children in and establishing etiquette and routines greatly enhances the social aspects of the whole setting.

The principles and philosophy of the setting are periodically reviewed by staff and are made clear in the prospectus, website and during face-to-face discussions with parents.

Learning and Development:

The learning and development provision at Merrydays is strongly rooted in Montessori pedagogy, with well-organized and accessible areas of learning.

Both the Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework are combined effectively for the younger children, with the adults skillfully recording the activities done by these children. All staff work well together to ensure that the planning, recording and assessment of learning supports each child's development. During both re-accreditation visits the work cycle ran from 9.15 to 12.00 for the younger children. The learning during the work cycle was accessed by all children, who displayed high levels of engagement. Children exercised free and spontaneous choice when selecting materials, although there were no group activities led by them.

Whilst outside, the children have free choice of a rich assortment of activities and materials. The improvements made to the planning and assessments in this area since the first re-accreditation visit have enabled staff to increase the number of focused presentations.

During both visits the children in the primary room worked well and understood their tasks. They worked from a weekly plan, managing the order of their activities and the time spent on them. Children spontaneously helped each other with their work and displayed both a sense of purpose and joy whilst in the classroom. They would further benefit from increased independent use of cameras and other equipment to make records of their own work.

Record keeping is good, and now that all records are being combined into one document that also includes parental contribution, they have been greatly enhanced for the purpose of assessment of learning and development. The continued use of tracking software will enable staff to identify individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas to develop in their curriculum.

During the visits the adults understood and implemented their roles well, and were able to undertake a diverse range of responsibilities across the day.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The setting has four rooms and a reasonably sized outdoor space. The largest room, used mainly for the youngest children and as a base for art work, is both bright and spacious. The



two smaller nursery rooms have a mixture of tables and floor space with open shelving around the sides of the room. The rooms are organized into areas of learning, with the shelves arranged in a clear order.

Within the nursery rooms there is a good range of practical life, creative, language, sensorial, cultural and early maths materials. All the materials are well cared for by both children and adults, and are accessible and inviting for the children. The provision for practical life and creative materials is especially strong for the youngest children, whilst the book area is comfortable, spacious and uncluttered.

The primary classroom is thoroughly resourced, and it is clear that both staff and children work hard to keep it organized and to maintain easy access to the resources. The furniture is arranged in a wholly child-centred fashion, ensuring there is a good balance between both table and floor space.

Across the setting there is a good quantity of materials, and during both visits the children were able to access all areas during the work cycle. The adults work very well together, enabling the environment to run smoothly for the benefit of all.

The outside area provides children with a range of opportunities using both large and small equipment. The range is broad, covering physical development, mark making, some music, numeracy and imaginative play. There is seating available outside, although there are no sheltered areas. This area is well organized, through both the physical storage and shelving and the detailed record keeping now employed for outdoor learning.

Montessori practice: independence, including independence at home, freedom, respect

Independence is encouraged from the moment children enter the setting, hanging up their own coats and choosing where they wish to start their day in class. The daily work cycle runs well and during this time children of all ages have opportunities to organize and share snacks together, and clear up afterwards.

Staff show that they trust the children to access their own learning, and are flexible in supporting their movement around the building. The freedom to move from room to room, and to choose when, how and with whom they work is given to all children in the setting.

The recently established and well managed free flow to the outdoor environment from 9:30 has enhanced the good practice that is already in place. Staff operate respectfully and communicate clearly the boundaries that children need to know, in ways that are tailored to individuals.

The staff work together to provide a consistent approach for the children, they utilize routines to ensure predictability and stability, and they help to make links between how a child operates at school and at home by sharing ideas and information with parents about fostering independence.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Learning was managed beautifully inside the setting during both visits. A key person system is



in operation, but as all staff know the children they are able to move flexibly between children and areas to offer seamless provision. All children are able to mix freely across rooms and age groups, although the youngest children are encouraged to work in the largest room. This vertical grouping continues outside and all ages interact well here.

The adults know their roles well; for example, snack and art areas are monitored to ensure replenishment for continued use. All rooms have a calm and purposeful atmosphere, reflecting the levels of engagement exhibited by the children.

Planning for the work inside is seamless, and can be described as a 'well-oiled machine'. The sharing of information between staff, and the way they relocate to where they are needed is fluid and carried out naturally. The planning and management of the outdoor area is now very good; adults record presentations and independently accessed materials using both narrative and checklist observations, and are more engaged with children during their cycles of activity.

Before lunchtime, adults set up the tables and chairs for children to use. Staff support children with their needs during lunch time and sit with them to eat. The children clear their own litter into rubbish bins.

During the afternoon session there are well managed timetables for the provision of group activities, which are designed to engage all children present.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. They use a key person system to ensure children's welfare needs are met and that parents are informed and kept up to date with their child's progress.

Thorough records of children's learning and development are contributed to by all adults who work in the setting, and make reference to the Montessori curriculum, the EYFS and the National Curriculum for the primary age children. The setting now utilizes one combined record for a child during nursery and primary school years. This has not only reduced the amount of paperwork required, but also provides a clearer overview of development, and enables effective tracking of progress as an aid to planning.

Partnership with parents is good. Parents are very satisfied with the provision for their children. Whilst the introduction of a display board showing annotated photographs of children working has increased the parents' understanding of what happens during the day, it is also utilized by parents to give feedback to the setting about their children, and their achievements at home. The personal relationship could also be enhanced by giving parents further opportunities to see their children at work, for example by holding more open mornings and 'joining-in' days.

Staffing:

The setting benefits from outstanding leadership, and a clear organizational structure that is understood by staff. This is coupled with an excellent staff team, who work with a strong sense of unity. They are deployed efficiently, and across the setting they demonstrate exceptionally good practice.



Staff have formal written job descriptions and benefit from a thorough provision of continued professional development. They are very well qualified. Of the thirteen staff, eight have Montessori qualifications, and six have teaching qualifications.

Meetings are attended by all staff, who are able to share information in an open and supportive way. The team work for the benefit of all the children.

Staff are relaxed in their roles and duties, yet operate in a professional and purposeful manner. They are supported by an excellent owner/manager, whose enthusiasm for and commitment to Montessori principles is clearly apparent in the outcomes seen in the children who attend the setting.

Names of Assessors: Barbara Isaacs and Jeremy Clarke

Date of reports:

First visit – 25th September 2012

Second visit – 25th November 2012